

October 12, 2025

“Dead or Alive?”

Ephesians 2

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We are all born dead. Does that sound like a contradiction? It's not. This paradox is the theme of Ephesians 2: that we are all born physically alive but spiritually dead, and that the only way to be made spiritually alive is by trusting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. He takes our dead lives and makes them alive! Paul tells us there are three things that work to keep us dead, and three things that work to make us alive. Find out what they are as we study what God's Word says on the various things that affect our spiritual lives.

1. **Ephesians 2:1-10** – *“You He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”*
2. Spiritual life and death
 - a. All people are born physically alive but spiritually dead.
 - i. Paul used the word “dead” to describe us twice and the phrase “made us alive” twice to show the contrast between spiritual life and death.
 - ii. We are all born spiritually dead, meaning that we are all born with a nature bent (or inclined) to sin.
 1. **Psalms 51:5** – *“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”* (NIV)
 - iii. Only through faith in Christ can we be made alive.
 1. Christ breathes life into our dead souls.
 2. Like a hand gives purpose to a lifeless glove, so Christ gives purpose and life to all who trust in Him.
 3. **DISCUSS**: How has the Lord given you life, purpose, and hope?
 - b. People tend to focus on their physical lives over their spiritual lives.

- i. Because the spiritual life is unseen, people often neglect the practices that feed their spirit.
 - 1. **DISCUSS:** Do you tend to neglect the spiritual part of yourself? What are some “triggers” that you can use to remind yourself to draw near to God and feed your spirit?
 - ii. Though we ought to take care of our physical lives, they only have temporary value. Our spirits will live on for eternity.
 - 1. Our souls will spend eternity in one of two places: heaven or hell.
 - 2. God created hell for the devil and his angels.
 - 3. Those who join in that rebellion by rejecting Christ as Savior will end up in hell too.
 - 4. We must walk in line with the Spirit and avoid falling back to the dead life after having believed in Jesus.
- 3. Three things that kill
 - a. **Ephesians 2:2–3** – *“You once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”*
 - i. “The others” refers to other people; specifically, the unsaved.
 - b. There are three things that try to pull us back to the dead life:
 - i. The world
 - ii. The Devil
 - iii. The flesh
- 4. The world
 - a. The world’s objective is to squeeze you into its mold.
 - b. The world uses insults and indoctrination to shame Believers into compliance or silence.
 - i. When Jews were taken into Babylonian captivity, four young men among them purposed in their hearts to stay loyal to God.
 - 1. These four men were roughly 16–17 years old, and their names were Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael.
 - 2. The Babylonians tried to shape these four youths to their culture by educating them in their religion and changing their names to reflect pagan values and identities.
 - 3. Daniel’s name—meaning “God is my judge”—was changed to Belteshazzar—meaning “may Bel protect my life.”
 - 4. Hananiah’s name—meaning “the Lord is gracious”—was changed to Shadrach—meaning “illuminated by the sun god.”

5. Mishaël's name—meaning "Who is what God is" was changed to Meshach—meaning "who is what Aku is."
 6. Azariah's name—meaning "The Lord helps" was changed to Abed-Nego—meaning "servant of Nebo."
 7. **DISCUSS:** Does your identity come back to what God says about you, or what the world says about you? What is one identity God has given you from His Word?
- ii. Nazi Germany also indoctrinated their people with their Hitler Youth program.
 1. Nazi Germany rewrote history and distorted biology to claim supremacy.
 2. Thousands of teachers joined the Nazi teachers' association, believing and spreading Hitler's propaganda.
 3. In page 376 of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler said, "Through clever and constant application of propaganda, people can be made to see paradise as hell, and also the other way round."
 4. **DISCUSS:** Who or what shapes your perception of the world? How do you reorient yourself when the noise of the world tries to persuade you to see things their way?
 - c. **Colossians 2:8** – *"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."*
 - i. This world needs more Daniels and Esthers who stand on God's truth and refuse to conform to this world.
 1. **DISCUSS:** In what ways do the philosophies of the world "cheat you" if you believe them? What is one deception Christ delivered you from?
 2. **DISCUSS:** How can you purpose in your heart to conform to Christ rather than to the pattern of this world (**Daniel 1:8; Romans 12:2**)? Who do you have around you to support you in this purpose?

5. The Devil

- a. The Devil has many names.
 - i. **Ephesians 2:2** calls the Devil the "*prince of the power of the air.*"
 1. Satan operates "*in the air*"—in the unseen realm.
 - ii. Jesus in **John 8:44** calls the Devil "*a murderer from the beginning*" and "*a liar and the father of it.*"
 - iii. The Devil is also called Satan, Lucifer, a fallen angel, and many other names.
- b. The Devil's objective is to return us to a dead life, often using these four tools:

- i. Temptation
 - ii. Deception
 - iii. Condemnation
 - iv. Accusation
 - v. **DISCUSS:** Which of Satan's tools has he used most in your life? How can you combat the Enemy's tool with God's truth?
- c. The Devil is not all-powerful.
 - i. **Colossians 2:15** – Christ, *"having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it [the cross]."*
 - 1. The Devil still retains the power to sow evil in the world.
 - 2. However, the only power and authority Satan has on Believers' lives is what we give him.
 - 3. By succumbing to Satan's temptation, deception, condemnation, and accusation, we open the door to Satan's work in our lives.
 - 4. **DISCUSS:** How has God disarmed the power of Satan in your life, allowing you to say no to evil in a way you could not do before?
 - ii. **James 4:7** – *"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."*
 - 1. **DISCUSS:** What does it mean to submit to God? How does coming under the Father's covering—even in "minor" matters—fortify you against the Enemy's schemes?

6. The flesh

- a. The objective of the flesh is to satisfy our every desire.
 - i. We cannot abdicate responsibility by blaming Satan and the world for our sinful choices.
 - 1. The sinful desires of our fleshly nature still reside in us, and we as Christians must reject them.
 - ii. Not every physical desire of our bodies is wrong.
 - 1. God gave us bodies, and He gave us good desires.
 - 2. However, the flesh consists of good desires wrongly exercised.
 - iii. **Galatians 5:19–21** – *"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."*

1. Paul's list in Galatians is not exhaustive, which is why he said, *"and the like."*
2. **Romans 8:12b** – *"You have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do."* (NLT)

7. Three things that make us alive

- a. **Ephesians 2:4–7** – *"But God, who is rich in **mercy**, because of His great **love** with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His **grace** in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."*
 - i. Lean into the three things God's given us to make us alive rather than on the three things that make us dead.
- b. God's mercy, love, and grace
 - i. God is merciful to us.
 1. Mercy means not getting the just punishment that we deserve.
 - a. We must first acknowledge that we are sinners in need of Jesus' rescue.
 - b. When we throw ourselves at the mercy of the Judge of all the earth, we will experience the rich mercy of our God.
 2. **Psalms 103:8** – *"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy."*
 3. **Psalms 103:10a** – *"He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities."* (NIV)
 - ii. God is loving to us.
 1. Our New Testaments were originally written in Greek, and the Greek word translated "love" in verse 4 is **agapē**.
 - a. **Agapē** is sacrificial love—the highest form of love.
 2. **Jeremiah 31:3** – *"The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: 'Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.'"*
 3. **Romans 5:8** – *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*
 - a. God put His love into action by sacrificing His Son on the cross for us.
 - b. One of Satan's deceptions is to make us think that God does not love us because we are unworthy.
 - c. The truth is, God loves us even though we are unworthy. God does not love our sin, but He loves us despite our sin.
 - iii. God is gracious to us.

1. Grace means getting blessings we do not deserve.
2. From God's grace, we gain adoption as sons and daughters into His family, abundance of life, and eternal life.
3. Abundance of life does not mean life without problems, but life with the source of life living in us, encouraging, counseling, and helping us through our struggles.
4. **John 3:16** – *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*
5. God is so gracious that He gives Believers eternal life and life more abundant.
6. **DISCUSS:** What characterizes the abundant life? How can you experience the abundant life amid your struggles?

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James (NKJV)